



Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan

Advocates for Healthy Weight in Children

September 20, 2016

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee:

Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan is pleased to support the bicycle safety package before this committee. I strongly urge you to vote in favor SB1029, SB1030, SB1076, SB1077, and SB1078. Collectively, these bills protect vulnerable roadway users, create clear standards for how to safely pass a bicyclist, and improve drivers' education in Michigan to put a greater emphasis on bicycle safety.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan is a coalition of nearly 200 organizations all dedicated to reducing childhood obesity in our state. It is important to provide safe bicycling environments to encourage our children, and people of all ages, to lead healthy, active lifestyles.

Michigan lags behind other states in protecting bicyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users. In 2015 bicycle fatalities in Michigan increased a startling 57%. Sadly, 2016 is on track to be even more tragic, with 18 bicycle fatalities as of August 31. By supporting these bills, this committee is in the unique position to prevent future senseless tragedies.

That starts by improving drivers' education. Michigan does not spend adequate time teaching new drivers about bicyclists' rights and how to safely share the road. Failing to include bicycle safety in Michigan's drivers' education curriculum endangers the lives of all roadway users. Dedicating a specific amount of time will help to alleviate confusion among motorists and reduce common crashes.

The Office of Highway Safety and Planning reports that 55% of bicyclists involved in crashes in 2015 were "going straight ahead" prior to the crash. Creating clearer guidelines for how motorists can safely pass and interact with cyclists on the roads is essential. A five feet passing standard is the minimum distance sufficient to ensure safe passing and to help prevent a driver from striking a cyclist. Michigan is one of only eleven states without a law specifically requiring motorists to pass bicyclists safely.

Lastly, Michigan law already has enhanced penalties for drivers who injure or kill highway workers, children in designated school zones, and operators of slow-moving farm vehicles. It is time to recognize bicyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users as inherently vulnerable roadway users and give them similar protections. Pedestrians and bicyclists made up 21% of all roadway fatalities in 2015, a disproportionately high number considering they only accounted for 1.42% of all traffic crashes. The time is now to increase the standard of care for drivers around non-motorized roadway users.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan is very encouraged with the extensive public support for these bills and the wide bipartisan support among legislators. Thank you in advance for your leadership in supporting these common sense bills.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Maisner,
Chair
Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan